

## When Love Grows Cold

Hello & welcome to *Voice of the Church*. We've been looking at selections from the Song of Songs, reading this book the way the church has for much of its history, as a biblical-theological depiction of the mutual-love between the Son of David & his bride. Written as a *song* to move our affections & make us *feel* Christ's love. As one writer said, "to fix our eyes on Christ for long enough that we develop a stronger appetite for him." And perhaps no section of the book does more to 'fix our eyes on Christ' than the one we're about to consider, in Ch. 5. Which is also *honest* about the fact that sometimes our 'appetite for him' is *lacking*... Sometimes this heavenly bridegroom who's deigned to dwell with us is not desired by us. That's what we see in this part of the song: that sometimes love grows cold, as the king comes *knocking* & the bride does not desire him... Look with me at the bride's rejection of the king, & reflection on the king in Song of Songs 5:

She says: "I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking. 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night...' [But] I had put off my garment; how could I put it on? I'd bathed my feet; how could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch & my heart was thrilled. I arose to open to my beloved, & my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh on the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned & gone... My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him but found him not; I called, but he gave no answer. The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, bruised me, & took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls... I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, tell him I'm sick with love.'

And they say, 'What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?'

And she says, 'My beloved is radiant & ruddy, distinguished among 10,000. His head is the finest gold, his locks are wavy, black as a raven. His eyes like doves, beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool. His cheeks like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. His arms rods of gold, set with beryl. His body is polished ivory, his legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet, & he's altogether lovely. This is my beloved; this is my friend.'"

It's a beautiful reflection on the king's beauty, after her rejection of him. And, so, we'll consider both of those briefly. First, her rejection. She's in bed & hears him knocking, speaking those gentle words: "Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one." Each phrase exalting the bride as the object of affection, whom he desires union with, yet in a way that shows honor. He's gentle; he doesn't force his way in & demand his rights but *waits*... And when she *refuses*, leaves a token of blessing behind in vv. 4 & 5, putting his hand by the latch of the door, leaving that liquid myrrh— something like a love-note or flowers... Gentle in every way... Yet in the face of his gentle overture, the bride is unreceptive, & says, "I've already taken off my robe; how can I put it back on? I've already washed my feet; how can I get them dirty?" And leaves him out in the dew of the night.

There's a *coldness & disinterest* in her words... This same bride who said his love is "better than wine" & desired to be taken to "his house of wine," now says, "I can't get my feet dirty & be just a little inconvenienced for you..." The same bride who confessed in 2:16, "My beloved is mine & I am his" withholds her affection from him... And this is clearly the assessment of the text; she herself believes her words to have been wrong based on the regret she feels just after, as she goes out to look for him, deciding her concerns were not worth refusing him... She pronounces herself in the wrong, having acted as if she belongs to herself **only**, when, in fact, they belong to each other...

This is a poetic depiction of the bride of Christ refusing communion with him because of the minor inconvenience it may cause... She's like the church in Laodicea in Rev. 3, where Christ stands at the door & knocks, desiring fellowship, but is left outside... She's supposed to "hasten as a bride to meet him, eagerly & gladly greet him," but in her sluggishness & desire for convenience, rejects him! So, he *departs*... "She seeks him but cannot find him, calls but gets no answer..." The language sounds like Hosea 5, where Israel (God's bride) "goes out to seek him but does not find him, for he'd withdrawn himself..." When God's people refuse him, it sometimes leads to withdrawal... That's what we see in the Exile: God's discipline. And I believe v. 4 supports that, as her *heart yearning* for him only appears in one other place: in the context of God's heart "yearning" for his exiled people in Jer. 31.

So, there is this separation between the bride & king, as a result of her rejection. Which leads to what we find in v. 7: "The watchmen who went about the city struck & wounded me; & took away my veil..." Watchmen in Ezekiel 3 refer to the prophets who keep watch over God's people, & sometimes proclaim his judgment. Which is what they're doing here: executing God's discipline. Which serves its intended purpose in strengthening her resolve yet more in v. 8, charging the daughters of Zion to help her find her beloved...

So, the daughters ask, “*Why? What’s so special about him?*” Leading to her reflection on him in the rest of our passage... Where she reflects on his excellencies, in vv. 10-16a, & his relation to her in 16b. “He is radiant & ruddy, chief among 10,000, his head like the finest gold, eyes like doves by rivers, bathed in milk. His cheeks like beds of spices, mounds of scented herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping myrrh. His arms, rods of gold, set with beryl, his body, carved ivory inlaid with sapphires, his legs, pillars of marble set on gold. His countenance like the cedars of Lebanon, & his mouth most sweet; he is altogether lovely...

If you’re trying to picture him, you might be a bit puzzled, because she’s not describing what he *looks* like, but is giving theological-imagery to describe what he means to her. He’s “ruddy” like David in 1 Sam. 16 – who was ruddy with bright eyes & good-looking, & God said, ‘Anoint him; this is the one.’ Her description has *royal* connotations. As does the line about being “chief among ten-thousand.” It reminds you of that song, “Saul sleighed his thousands; David his **ten-thousands**.” The description of his head of gold sounds like Daniel 2, that statue signifying the kingdoms of the earth. The imagery is royal...The description of his body in v. 14 as carved ivory inlaid with sapphires recalls Solomon’s throne in 1 Kings 10, his palace in Psalm 45... The mention of “white,” “ruddy,” “milk,” & “sapphire” all come together in Lam. 4 to describe the “princes” of Zion... The imagery is *symbolic & royal*.

There’s promised-land & garden imagery. “Rivers of water” in v. 12, “washed with milk,” spices, herbs, & lilies... Beryl & sapphire, which appear in *Eden* (Ezek. 28), & the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21). This is highly symbolic imagery. That sounds like the temple in 1 Kings 7, with the capitals, pillars, & water-tank shaped as a **lily** like his lips in v. 13, from which **myrrh** drips (the smell of the holy oil in Ex. 30) ... “**Pillars of marble,**” “**bases of gold,**” “**cedars of Lebanon**” all associated with the temple. “Pillars” in 1 Kings 7, “marble” in 1 Chron. 29, “cedars of Lebanon” in 1 Kings 5. The song’s idealized king is described with royal, Edenic, temple-like language because he is the *King of Kings, the true temple & dwelling-place-of-God, Lord of the Garden* who walks with his people... This description goes beyond Solomon to the one who’s ‘altogether lovely,’ whose words are sweet like honey (Psalm 119). It’s a description “of the beloved of the church!”

Who, though altogether lovely & glorious, desires to be with his bride in 5, v. 2... In fact, SO MUCH that his *white* & sinless appearance will become *red & ruddy* by the blood of the Cross! His *eyes like doves* will be covered, as they strike him. The *hair on his cheeks* will be ripped out!

His “hands of gold” will be *pierced!* His body of ivory *disfigured* on the Cross... As he bears the discipline of v. 7 **for sinners** – being stricken, wounded, & stripped... The wonder of vv. 10-16 is that this king would condescend & go to the Cross to reclaim the bride who rejects him in v. 3! HE will take off his robe; HE’ll defile his feet, so SHE can be restored... And be called his lover & friend in v. 16. Where she reflects not only on his excellencies, but his relation to her. “This is my *lover & friend...*” She rejoices not only in his excellencies, but his relation to her as lover & friend. ‘

And I wish we had more time to unfold this, but let me just leave you with this thought: the glorious king described in vv. 10-16 desires to be your lover & friend. He’s willing to take your shame in order to do so, & knocks on the door this day, desiring communion with you... Perhaps you’ve sinned against him & rejected him as the bride does in the first part of our passage. But the good news of the gospel is this glorious king is also a friend of sinners who’ll receive you... Thank you for listening, & may God bless you.